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OJIBWA TALES¹

BY TRUMAN MICHELSON

THE following tales were obtained last winter, when a delegation of Ojibwas from White-Earth visited Washington. The informants were Julius Brown (aged forty-two) of the Sturgeon Clan, and Big-Bear (fifty-nine years old) of the Marten Clan. Both are full-bloods, and belong to the Mississippi Band of Ojibwas. The former served also as interpreter.

I. TWO STORIES OF SPOTTED-GOPHER

There was one old man by the name of Spotted-Gopher. He was a story-teller. All that he said was not true. He told at one time that he saw Those-that-live-in-the-Water² early in the morning. When he went after his net, they stole his fish. He followed them with his canoe. He overtook them. And he struck them with his paddle, and he never saw them again.

Another story that happened to him, he told. Once he chased human beings. The one he chased was called Bird. His speed was as fast as sight. Spotted-Gopher's speed was as fast as thought. And he overtook the one whose speed was as fast as sight, and he killed him. This is one of the stories of Spotted-Gopher.

2. AN ADVENTURE OF WĒNABŪ'ŽU

Wēnabū'žu was living with his grandmother. While hunting in the woods for his grandmother, at one time he thought about his mother. He wondered what had become of his mother: so he concluded to ask his grandmother. When he returned home from hunting, after he had eaten his supper of venison, he asked his grandmother, "Where is mother? Whatever became of mother?" — "My grandson, some enemy came and took your mother away, and murdered her. This enemy lives way off. He lives on an island in a great big lake. It is almost impossible to reach him. Eventually he will murder you if you ever reach him. I therefore advise you not to go." So when Wēnabū'žu went out hunting again the next day, he thought over this matter of going to war with this man. He was now getting to manhood. He was quite a young man. He therefore asked his grandmother how to reach this enemy. So his grandmother gave

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² Those-that-live-in-the-Water are a tiny people, entirely naked, and hairy all over.

him instructions how to reach this place. "The first thing to do is to make a canoe of birch-bark, and sew it with cedar-roots, and pitch it with pine-pitch. And then go on the lake. Get some fish that have a lot of oil in them." Well, he went according to the directions of his grandmother. The grandmother made oil from this fish. So he started with this oil in his canoe. When he had gone quite a ways off, and reached the island where his enemy lived, then the water began to change into pitch while he was paddling. So he took his oil. He began to oil his paddle and his canoe. Finally he got through this pitchy water. When he got to the shore, there were a lot of birds there, and squirrels. All these birds and animals which he saw on the island belonged to this man, the enemy. They were all ready to make known to the man that an enemy had come on shore. Wēnabū'žu prevailed on them; for Wēnabū'žu had power to talk with those animals, those birds. So he went up to the wigwam. It just happened that the man was away from home. In the mean while, while he was waiting for him, he took his pipe and began to smoke; and he examined the wigwam inside. He found his enemy's bows. These were twelve in number. He noticed that there was a little bird there. It was a chickadee. Wēnabū'žu asked this Chickadee which was the best bow in the whole lot. The Chickadee showed him two or three bows, telling him that these bows were used for war. "If you battle with him, he will be bound to get one of these bows." As a reward to the Chickadee, Wēnabū'žu painted him. Then the man came, the enemy came. Wēnabū'žu got up, introduced himself, telling him he came on a friendly visit. Then they smoked their pipes, telling stories to one another. Wēnabū'žu, during the absence of his enemy, made arrangements with the Owl to come hooting around there in the morning, promising the Owl, "If I succeed in beating him, I will liberate you all, so you can go anywhere you wish." Just at daybreak in the morning, the Owl came hooting there. Wēnabū'žu jumped up with his arrows, ran out. His enemy followed right after him. Wēnabū'žu turned around and shot his enemy. The enemy returned the shot. They had a battle all day. Wēnabū'žu shot this man all over, endeavoring to find out where the seat of his life was. Just at sundown he shot him on one of the braids of his hair (this man had very long hair). He killed him instantly. After he killed this man, he looked all over the house, the wigwam. Then he found the scalp of his mother. After he liberated all the animals that had been kept there, then he returned back to his grandmother. Then the old grandmother prepared a feast. They had a dance, which they call a scalp-dance because he had brought a scalp to his grandmother. This was Wēnabū'žu's first war-path.